

Jury System Improvement Project

Reform of the California jury system is one of the Judicial Council's top priorities. Chief Justice Ronald M. George, Chair of the Judicial Council, has urged legislators to make statutory changes to improve conditions for jurors and to encourage and increase citizen participation on juries.

The appointment of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Jury System Improvement in 1995 represented the Judicial Council's first major effort in recent history to undertake a comprehensive review of the jury system. The commission's 100-page report, submitted to the council in May 1996, included numerous legislative proposals as well as many other recommendations, which have been referred to various council committees or staff for further action.

LEGISLATION SPONSORED

The Judicial Council voted to sponsor legislation to carry out a variety of the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations. Among the current proposals are statutory changes that would increase jurors' compensation and, in cases of hardship, provide reimbursement for child or dependent care beginning with the second day of jury service.

TASK FORCE ON JURY SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

The Judicial Council Task Force on Jury System Improvements is a statewide panel charged with encouraging excellence in the California jury system. The 18-member task force is composed

of judges, lawyers, court administrators, and representatives of community groups who will provide guidance to the Judicial Council on implementing a wide range of jury reforms.

ONE-DAY/ONE-TRIAL

In May 1999 the Judicial Council adopted a rule of court to create a one-day/one-trial jury system throughout the state. Under this system, a juror need only appear for one day unless he or she is selected for a trial. If not chosen for a trial or assigned to jury selection on the first day of service, the juror will have satisfied his or her obligation for at least one year.

TASK FORCE ON JURY INSTRUCTIONS

Based on the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations, the Judicial Council created the statewide Task Force on Jury Instructions to draft civil and criminal jury instructions that accurately state the law in simple English.

RULES AND STANDARDS ADOPTED

The Judicial Council adopted the following new and revised rules of court and standards of judicial administration based on the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations.

- New rule 861 requires one-day or one-trial jury service.
- New rule 860 requires rather than encourages, jury commissioners to apply the standards regarding the granting of hardship excuses.

- Revised standard 4.5 recommends that each court establish a reasonable mechanism for receiving and responding to juror complaints.
- New standard 4.6 recommends that the jury commissioner use the National Change of Address System or other comparable means to update juror lists.
- Revised standard 8.8 encourages the Center for Judicial Education and Research to provide educational materials to judicial officers, court administrators, and jury staff on the treatment of jurors; to recommend that presiding judges ensure that all court employees who interact with jurors are properly trained; and to recommend that judges who conduct jury trials be trained in the conduct of voir dire and the treatment of jurors.
- New standard 8.9 sets forth trial management standards designed to reduce burdens on the jury.

Contact: Trial Court Services Division, 415-865-7588.

The 27-member Judicial Council is the policymaking body of the California courts, the largest and busiest court system in the nation. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice and in accordance with the California Constitution, the council is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice. The Administrative Office of the Courts serves as the staff agency to the council.